

Philip Derriman, *True to the Blue: A History of the New South Wales Cricket Association*. Richard Smart Publishing, Sydney, 1985. Illus., pp.x+244. \$19.95 hardbound.

It is of some interest to cricket followers in New South Wales that while the national team stumbles from one disaster to the next, their state eleven goes from triumph to triumph. No task it seems is too daunting for the Blues. With three Sheffield Shield titles in the past four seasons, a memorable victory over the West Indians in November 1984 and a wholly New South Wales inspired win over the same formidable Carribean combination in January 1985, there seems to be only one question to be asked in Australian cricketing circles. Why have the national selectors not abandoned this ludicrous policy of looking over the whole continent for players and simply selected the New South Wales team en masse with Border, a New South Welshman by birth and training, to lead them?

It is fitting that at the height of the New South Wales revival Philip Derriman's *True to the Blue: A History of the New South Wales Cricket Association* has appeared. *True to the Blue* is not simply the history of a cricket association. Given the pre-eminence of the NSWCA as the controlling body of New South Wales cricket, a history of it is to a large extent a history of cricket in the state. With the support of Bob Radford and the assistance of the indefatigable Cliff Winning, secretary and honorary librarian of the NSWCA respectively, Derriman, a journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, has made substantial use of the Association's minutes and other records. Where the minutes were sketchy or otherwise unhelpful Derriman has made good use of newspapers and, for the later period, the recollections of old players and officials.

Using a broadly chronological approach, Derriman begins on a mildly controversial note, establishing beyond doubt that the NSWCA was formed in 1859 not, as many (including the organisers of the Association's centenary celebrations) had thought, 1857. The error is explained by the incomplete records of the early period and the poor arithmetic of Frank Iredale, secretary of the NSWCA from 1914 to 1926. The importance of the period before 1914 is reflected in the fact that fifteen of the book's twenty-six chapters are devoted to it. Derriman has produced a lively and readable account of the development of New South Wales cricket in the second half of the nineteenth century; the gradual assumption of control over New South Wales cricket by the NSWCA, the establishment and development of the Sydney Cricket Ground, the failure of the NSWCA to sponsor

early Australian teams and its efforts to control them once it became apparent that they would make money, and the implementation of local or 'electorate' cricket. It is only on this last point that I can find fault with Derriman's analysis.

Local cricket was one of the most important developments in New South Wales cricket. It not only revived interest in club cricket by tapping suburban rivalry and producing a more evenly balanced competition; the creation of a chain of enclosed grounds with good wickets also led to a dramatic improvement in the quality of club cricket. This improvement, together with the retirement of a number of senior players well past their best, rejuvenated New South Wales cricket. Derriman suggests that the NSWCA was behind the introduction of local cricket but in fact the credit must go to Lewis Abrams, an alderman from the suburb of Glebe, and a number of other enthusiasts who set up suburban cricket associations not connected with the NSWCA. Suburban cricket became very popular but it was only in 1892 when these groups appeared likely to assume control of club cricket that the NSWCA reluctantly abandoned its old senior club competition in favour of local cricket.

It is always a bold task to write the history of a 125 year period, especially when the subject is largely unexplored. Inevitably, too, when a journalist produces a history social historians will tend to be unsatisfied with the result. In some ways Derriman raises more questions than he answers. For example, he states that in the 1890s the NSWCA was 'one of Sydney's leading institutions, with a big budget and big responsibilities' (p.100), but its place and personalities are never seen against the broader backdrop of Sydney society. As a result, the NSWCA's social and political significance, especially in the nineteenth century, is under-rated. Nevertheless, this is a pioneering work for which Derriman is to be congratulated. We can only hope that the Australian Cricket Board takes note of the NSWCA's initiative in commissioning the book.

Martin Sharp
Historical Research Section
Department of Foreign Affairs
Canberra